

But if the British Association is really to take for one of its tasks the bringing of science home, so to speak, to the British public, if it is to give its energies to what the French call "vulgarisation," and if in addition it is to promote co-operation and understanding between workers in different branches, then it must modify not only the procedure at its meetings, but also the character of its printed reports. These are often scrappy and confusing in the extreme. More attention ought to be paid to systematic expositions of recent scientific developments set forth in such a manner that they can be read and understood by everyone with a fair all-round scientific education, and supplemented by exhaustive references for those who wish to go into the subject. Such "Reports on the State of Science" will not be a new departure in the history of the Association. A good recent example of a difficult mathematical subject so treated is to be found in H. Bateman's report "On the History and Present State of the Theory of Integral Equations," printed in the 1910 Report. On the other hand, much of the material now published under the heading "Reports on the State of Science" seems to me far too special, and could with advantage be published elsewhere.

As to the meetings, I agree entirely with the view expressed in the leading article that the function of a section "should not be technical discussion by specialists for specialists, but the enlightenment of an extensive group of workers as to main lines of advances in fields not specifically their own." To obtain this result what is needed is not a succession of papers by individual specialists, but rather one or two stimulating addresses by a carefully selected lecturer who can be trusted to avoid the faults referred to in your article.

At the same time I suggest there should also be social and entirely informal meetings for semi-private discussion. These should be for real, effective comparing of notes by workers on the same lines, each set chatting round its own table; a member, during the course of one meeting, might talk and listen at several tables in succession.

About organisation, the arbitrary division of science into watertight sections is inevitably bound to lead to trouble as subjects grow. (Incidentally, there is much to be said against the present classification.) The main trouble, however, is that with the sections as at present it is nobody's business to arrange joint meetings to deal with border-line subjects. A possible solution would be to have standing joint committees of groups of sections, the sole duty of which should be that of co-ordination. If need be, the same section could appear in more than one group; thus chemistry might take its place both in a physical and in a physiological group.

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September 21.

THE problem of the best use that we can make of the annual meetings of the British Association is one that presents many difficulties. There is so much to be accomplished and so little time available—less than ever since 1914, though in this respect I understand the former conditions are to be restored next year.

At present the most important functions of the Association are to stimulate and maintain the interest and activities of local workers, and to enable men of science who are engaged on problems which require the co-operation of a number of observers scattered about the country to obtain new recruits. At the same time the meetings give them the opportunity of addressing a wider audience than that afforded by the scientific societies—an audience which includes a large number of university workers who are resident in the provinces

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during the university terms and a certain proportion of the men and women, all too few in number, who take an intelligent interest in science, though they have not adopted it as a career.

But, as you have indicated, the Association has almost wholly failed to appeal to the man of at least ordinary intelligence and education who has never seriously considered the purpose and achievements of science. This is, I believe, largely the fault of the methods of our schools. If science has been taught at all, the aim has been to drill the pupil in the use of correct technical language and in the exact mathematical expression of natural laws, instead of to implant a living interest in the subject—a far more important matter in the early stages of mental development.

However that may be, the task with which we are now faced is to attract to the meetings those who are at present quite apathetic about all that concerns the progress of science. We already have a few popular lectures on Royal Institution lines, and no doubt it would be desirable to increase their number; but they should be comparatively brief—forty minutes at most—and arrangements should always be made for the discussion of debatable points by competent speakers. Nothing is so calculated to increase the interest and facilitate the understanding of a subject as its presentation from different aspects. Perhaps the greatest successes of recent meetings have been the inter-sectional discussions, which have on one hand aroused popular interest, and on the other done much to develop co-operation between different branches of science.

I am not in agreement with the idea that a meeting of the British Association should not be made an occasion for the announcement of new discoveries or for the description of new developments in research. Provided they are not of too abstruse a character, they are of great value in increasing the prestige of the Association among its members.

If, however, we wish to attract larger audiences of the general public and secure a wider membership, we must do more to advertise the meetings. Something in the nature of a *catalogue raisonné* of the more interesting features should be circulated some weeks beforehand, especially in the neighbourhood to be visited. Short illustrated articles should be contributed to the local papers indicating the topics that are to be considered and the problems that present themselves for solution—sufficient to whet, but not to satiate, the curiosity of the man in the street, so that he may understand that he will not be compelled to listen to dissertations on abstract subjects in unintelligible phraseology, but will have the opportunity of hearing important and interesting questions discussed in a simple, straightforward fashion that any intelligent man will be able to follow.

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Imperial College, September 22.

I HAVE been greatly interested in the leading article in NATURE of September 16 on the position of the British Association. Anyone is interested in an expression of his own views in better language than he can himself command.

While it is the function of the several scientific societies to do their utmost for the advancement of science, each within its own narrow limits, the Royal Society affording common ground for discussion for the *élite* only, the British Association has primarily a double duty to the nation and to the world. On one hand, it should encourage the "cross-fertilisation of the sciences," as no other body can, by bringing together the members of its various Sections so that each may help the others. This co-operation is valuable,